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AMERICAN LUTHERAN SYNODS AND SLAVERY, 1830–60

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AFTER 1820, owing to the opening-up of new areas of settlement and the great increase in immigration, the Lutheran church in the United States began to grow and expand rapidly. In 1830 it claimed 569 congregations, 42,876 communicants, and not less than 200,000 in its total constituency.[1] These were included in 10 district synods in not less than 13 states. In 1840 the numbers had risen to 1,200 congregations, 101,510 communicants, and from 400,000 to 500,000 total constituency in 15 synods in about as many states.[2] In 1830 the federal census counted 12,866,020; in 1840, 17,069,453. Thus, while the population was growing at the rate of $33\frac{1}{3}$ per cent, the Lutheran constituency was growing more than $133\frac{1}{3}$ per cent.

With this growth, greatly aided by immigration, came also a new emphasis on the confessional interest illustrated by two lines of development in the church. One was a more marked attempt to speak, think, and act as did the non-Lutheran, English-speaking churches in the same communities. This manifested itself in a deeper interest in the various reform movements of the day, such as temperance, Sabbath observance, and the Anti-Slavery Crusade, and in co-operation with the general interdenominational agencies, such as the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, and the American Tract Society. There was more emphasis upon likenesses to

[1] *Proceedings of the Sixth General Synod* (October–November, 1831), pp. 25 ff.; *Lutheran Observer*, N.S., I (February, 1834), 204, 223. A ratio of 1 to 5 between communicants and total constituency is a little high, but it is convenient; the true ratio lies between 1 to 4 and 1 to 5.

[2] *Lutheran Almanac for 1842* (Baltimore, 1841), p. 31. These figures are for the whole Lutheran church, not merely for the General Synod.

other denominations and less upon differences. The chief agency in promoting this spirit in the Lutheran church was the General Synod (1820), which, however, in 1830 included only 4 of the 10 existing district synods, and which had its center at the Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (1826). Its chief prophet was the Rev. Dr. Samuel Simon Schmucker, the outstanding Lutheran leader of the day, who had, however, received his theological training at Princeton and was later to become a strong pillar supporting the Evangelical Alliance.

The other line of development was the tendency to withdraw from such slight co-operation as had been carried on with these movements and agencies by the old ministeriums of Pennsylvania (1748) and New York (1786). Added to this was the strengthening of the Ohio (1818) and Tennessee (1820) synods, both of which had very conservative origins, and, very importantly, the springing up of new bodies, the fruits of later immigration from Germany, which bodies were in later years to challenge the older bodies for leadership among the Lutherans in America. This line of development was partly the result of the leadership of Walther, Loehe, Grabau, and others, from whose activity were organized the Missouri Synod (1847), the Iowa Synod (1854), and the Buffalo Synod (1845). Leadership from abroad was also, to a lesser degree, supplied the older bodies and with the same tendency. Synods organized or affected by this new leadership represented the other extreme from the General Synod. They stressed differences from other denominations and minimized likenesses; they particularly emphasized the confessional idea and considered that the interest of an ecclesiastical body should embrace only the strictest of ecclesiastical matters. Obviously, no place was found in their deliberations for consideration of reform movements, laudable as these might be as social and political desiderata, and which, as private citizens, they might be interested to consider. Between the two extremes were places for various attitudes and practices. The confessional idea, extreme in certain cases, was moderately adopted in

others, while it was ardently condemned in still others. This fact must be borne in mind if we are to understand the attitude of the several synods of the Lutheran church toward slavery.

In the decade of the thirties the Anti-Slavery Crusade got under way and immediately made its impression upon American church life. It is in order, then, to inquire as to the degree of interest and action that this aroused in the various Lutheran synods.

The two oldest bodies—the Pennsylvania and New York ministeriums—did not officially consider the question of slavery in the whole period before the Civil War. This, however, must not be construed necessarily as evidence of indifference. It is, indeed, strong evidence of the belief governing these bodies of the inappropriateness of consideration of such a matter by an ecclesiastical body. Both of these synods came to a rather strict confessional position, and both remained for the greater part of the period outside of the General Synod. At the same time, their attitude must not be taken as expressing the attitude of all Lutheran bodies in the two states whose names they bore. By 1860 there were in Pennsylvania five other district synods; in New York, two.

Two other synods took no action concerning slavery before the war. These were the synods of Ohio and Tennessee. In both cases the confessional attitude determined the practice.[3] Again, these synods did not represent, by 1860, all the churches or synods in these two states.

In 1830 the Hartwick Synod, representing churches around Albany and westward, was formed by withdrawal of churches from the New York ministerium, because of dissatisfaction with the position of the latter body. At its convention in 1836 the subject of the abolition of slavery was introduced in the form of a preamble and resolutions expressive of abhorrence of the sys-

[3] For exceptions to this general statement, see *Report* for 1822 of the Tennessee Synod, p. 13; S. Henkel, *History of the Evangelical Lutheran Tennessee Synod* (New Market, Virginia, 1890), p. 52; *Proceedings of the Tenth Synod* (Ohio), p. 7.

tem of slavery. After discussion, begun in the morning session and continuing into the afternoon, it was decided that the subject of the abolition of slavery should be indefinitely postponed.[4] At the next convention in September, 1837, the president included the following statement in his report:[5]

> And let us be on our guard, that whilst engaged in the good work of temperance, we act upon the principle of love, and whilst agitating the great question that involves southern interests, and, as some might think, northern accountability, we are urging no coercive measures to oppress the churches.

No further mention of the subject was made at that time, but it was touched upon two years later when it was:[6]

> Resolved, that contention and strife in politics are inconsistent with the spirit of religion, and dangerous to Christian principle. And that the members of the Churches in our connexion be earnestly and affectionately requested to abstain from those party feelings and animosities which cause divisions among Christian brethren, and bring a reproach on religion.

What does not appear on the face of these items is that the question of slavery had very seriously affected the strength and peace of the Hartwick Synod. In May, 1837, largely because of the attitude of a majority in the Hartwick Synod, a group of ministers, with their churches, had withdrawn to organize a new and competing body, the Franckean Synod. Impatient with the ways of even the moderate Hartwick Synod, this little group developed a set of attitudes and practices, in both ecclesiastical and secular interests, to which the designation "radical" may be applied without injustice. Because of its position, it was denied for several decades admittance into even the liberal General Synod.[7] The attitude and activity of the Franckean Synod with respect to slavery represents the greatest degree of opposition to that institution to be found among Lutheran bodies; and, indeed, it is doubtful if any group in any denomination exhibited a more extreme position.

[4] *Proceedings*, 1836, pp. 21, 22.

[5] *Minutes*, 1837, p. 29.

[6] *Ibid.*, 1839, p. 21.

[7] It was admitted in 1864.

An explanation of this phenomenon is found in the nature of the local situation. This section of New York was a hotbed of Abolitionism, and the attitude of the common run of people there was extreme. It was in this section that Gerrit Smith and others of like opinion lived and labored. Here the Lutheran church was not strong; and, naturally desiring to be recognized as "regular," some of its leaders were, no doubt, glad for the opportunity to show their agreement with majority opinion not only in such social matters as an attitude toward slavery but also in matters of doctrine and church practice. There seems to be no doubt that non-Lutheran doctrines and forms of worship, in such preponderance all around, profoundly affected the Franckean Synod and caused it to depart so far from traditional Lutheran ways of thinking and doing that it was viewed suspiciously by nearly every other Lutheran synod.

In May, 1837, at a meeting of pastors and laymen in central and east-central New York who were dissatisfied with the trend in the Hartwick Synod, a constitution with certain unusual provisions was unanimously adopted.[8] No layman was to be entitled to a seat in the conventions who was a slaveholder or in the liquor business; no minister could be a member of the synod who was a slaveholder, or who trafficked in human beings, or who advocated the system of slavery as it existed in the United States.

Limitations of space in this paper forbid a full exposition of the actions and opinions of this body on the subject of slavery. The purpose will, however, be served by citing and quoting some representative actions and opinions, if it is remembered that these are but a few of many citations and quotations which could be given.

On the day after the constitution had been adopted, the first

[8] *Proceedings of a Meeting*, May, 1837, pp. 8, 9; C. W. Heathcote, *The Lutheran Church and the Civil War* (New York, 1919), has studied the connection of this synod and slavery and gives many important quotations from its official records. *Journal of a Special Meeting*, October 5, 1837, p. 5, indicates that at that meeting there were represented 21 congregations and 1,650 communicants.

convention of the synod was held. Under the head of "American Slavery" the following resolutions were adopted:[9]

1. Resolved, That Slavery as it exists in the United States, ... is a sin . . . . , opposed to the spirit of the Gospel and a violation of the inalienable rights of man.

2. Resolved, That we do not deem it inexpedient for ecclesiastical bodies to interfere with the abolition of slavery; but that it is the duty of all such bodies of every evangelical denomination, to bear their decided testimony against the *Sin* of Slavery.

3. Resolved, That we have abundant cause for deep humiliation before God, that, as a denomination, we are so deeply involved in the *Sin of Slavery*, and that so many of our ministers practice the crime, and that so many others justify them in this iniquity.

4. Resolved, That we view the traffic in human beings as carried on in this country between the ministers of the Gospel and members of the churches, as revolting to humanity and as repugnant to the laws of Christ, as ever was the foreign slave trade.

At the convention held in June, 1838, several items of interest in the present connection are to be noted: "Our decided testimony against *American Slavery*" was given, and it was declared that "we, as a synodical body, are averse to American Slavery because it is void of *Truth and Love*." Slavery was held to be "opposed to the Bible and its claims," while it was contended that "to aver that the church should not interfere, is to say, that the church has no right to oppose and reform all moral evil and heaven provoking sin." More in the same vein is contained in the proceedings of this convention.[10]

The next year a report on American slavery was concurred in unanimously and ordered published in the *Lutheran Herald* (No. 12), a periodical which the Franckean Synod began to publish in January, 1839, in the interest of its objectives.[11] An

[9] *Journal*, 1837, p. 18.

[10] *Journal of the First Annual Session*, June, 1838, *passim*.

[11] It is unfortunate that the *Journal*, 1839, while recording this action, did not publish the report. A search in most likely places has failed to locate a file of this periodical. The New York State Library has a few scattering copies of the issues of 1839–40. The *Herald* was published partly because the *Lutheran Observer*, leading Lutheran organ, avoided the slavery issue.

extensive report of action with respect to slavery was given in the same *Journal*, including "Anti-Slavery Resolutions." These set forth that, whereas slavery pollutes the church of God, etc., it was resolved that it was the duty of every church to fight the system in order to free the slaves and save the country; "that the cause of the Abolition of Slavery is the cause of God"; that indifference was incompatible with the principles and spirit of Christianity; that ignorance could not excuse the sins of the slaveholders and their apologists, and little confidence could be reposed in their piety; and, finally, that the synod approved the constitution and organization of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

The influence of the Franckean Synod, small in numbers though it was, was felt at even this early date, for it came under the notice of the General Synod at its convention in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, in June, 1839. At this time both the Franckean and the Tennessee synods suffered the condemnation of the general body, the first because of its anti-slavery activities, the second because of its criticism of the General Synod's theological views. The "proceedings" and "practices" of the Franckean Synod were disapproved, and all the churches were exhorted to beware of the efforts of "these men"—both of the Franckean and Tennessee synods—to "cause division and offences contrary to the spirit of the Gospel."[12] Heathcote says that efforts were made to inject the discussion of the slavery question into the deliberations of the General Synod at several of its conventions; and that debate indeed took place in 1839 but without result, except as given above.[13]

The reaction of the Franckean Synod to the exhortation of the General Synod was that, since the latter warned against the two synods, it "solemnly and unanimously" resolved that the accusation was unfounded; but though its stand on *slavery and*

[12] *Proceedings*, General Synod, 1839, p. 17. Action rescinded, 1857, see *ibid.*, 1857, p. 25.

[13] *Op. cit.*, p. 60, citing the Chambersburg *Franklin Repository*, 1839.

other matters (italics mine) offended the General Synod, "yet we have the assurance that they meet the complete and unqualified *approbation* of the Holy God of Israel."[14]

Standing at the other extreme on this vital question was the Synod of South Carolina, which in 1835 numbered 14 ministers, 31 congregations, and 1,840 communicants. At its convention in 1835 this body paid its compliments to Abolitionists in general, viz.:[15]

1. Resolved, unanimously, that this Synod express their strongest disapprobation of the conduct of the Northern Abolitionists—that we look upon them as enemies of our beloved country; whose mistaken zeal is calculated to injure the cause of morals and religion.

2. Resolved, that we will hold no correspondence with the Northern Abolitionists, and that should they send to us any of their incendiary publications, we will immediately return them.

3. Resolved, that whilst we learn with heartfelt pleasure, that none of the ministers in our connexion in the United States, have adopted the sentiments of the Abolitionists; the members of this Synod pledge themselves, in behalf of their churches in connexion with them, that they will never countenance such doctrines.

At the next convention the following statement and resolution, defensive of the southern position, was agreed to:[16]

It having been stated, that some person or persons, in all probability of our own creed, living, perhaps, in the distant North, had made violent and unchristian attacks upon some of the clerical members of this Body by name, in some of the Northern prints, for holding property in the persons of Slaves, some expression of the opinion of this Body ensued, relative to the manner in which all attacks should be treated, and the impropriety and injustice of the interference or intermeddling of any religious or deliberative Body with the subject of *Slavery* and *Slave-holding*, *emancipation* or *abolitionism*, as agitated by the *affected patriots* and *self-interested*, and *more than rotten hearted benefactors* of this much commiserated race. As a full expression of the firm and unchanging determination of this Body, therefore:

XVI. Resolved, That this Synod will not at any time, enter into a discussion of Slavery, as agitated by the Abolitionists of the day, with such

[14] *Journal*, 1840, p. 21.

[15] *Extracts* (of the Minutes), 1835, pp. 8, 9.

[16] *Ibid.*, 1836, p. 20.

an entire absence of principle, and which has already produced such painful results in the deliberative councils and churches, in some branches of Christendom.

Having thus delivered itself, the synod recorded no statements as to abolitionism at any later time before the war, but did give attention to the better religious care and instruction of the negroes under the charge of its congregations, to its very great credit.

The Synod of Virginia (1829) at its convention in October, 1835, resolved:[17]

That this body view Abolitionism as a combination of ignorance, fanaticism, and dishonesty—alike opposed to our civil and religious institutions, and of a piece with all ultraism—folly.

Resolved, That we discountenance the circulation of all so-called religious papers, which are designed to support the cause of the abolitionists.

In 1839 the following pointed action was also taken:[18]

1. Resolved, That this body disclaims the ecclesiastical censorship of any particular Synod.

2. Resolved, That the pretensions of this description assumed by the Franckean Synod in regard to other ecclesiastical bodies, meet with our decided disapprobation, and that we totally discard any such arrogant assumption of synodical censorship.

3. Resolved, That we will not encourage the circulation of the "Lutheran Herald," published under the auspices of that body, among our members, and that we warmly recommend the "Lutheran Observer" to all who desire a religious paper, ...

The statement of 1835 was the most pronounced expression made by the Synod of Virginia in the whole period before the war. There is, however, sufficient evidence that it never changed its views.

The Synod of North Carolina did not express its views on the anti-slavery controversy at this time. It, however, did consistently strive for better religious care and instruction of the slaves within its limits, as action from time to time reveals. Evidence can indeed be produced to prove that it held the typical south-

[17] *Minutes*, 1835, p. 10.

[18] *Proceedings*, 1839, p. 11.

ern attitude toward slavery even though it did not officially declare itself, except on one occasion, later to be described.

At the opening of the forties the Franckean Synod became, if possible, more zealous in the cause of Abolitionism. In 1841 it unanimously passed a motion to recommend to the ministers and churches not to admit to their pulpits and the Lord's Supper "any person who is a slaveholder or traffics in human beings, . . . ,"[19] and it resolved unanimously that it was the duty of Christian ministers and all Christian churches to rebuke the accursed system of slavery. The most aggressive action which the synod took at this time was the preparation and transmission of a *Fraternal Appeal* on the subject of American slavery. This was to be transmitted to each Evangelical Lutheran synod in the United States and published in the *Lutheran Herald*.[20]

At the convention in 1843 the Rev. P. Wieting, in his president's report, mentioned the disappointment experienced by the synod in not getting the hoped-for results from the *Appeal*.[21] He said that not one Lutheran synod had formally responded. The Committee on Synods reported later in the same convention and was especially interested in the reaction of the synods to the *Appeal*.[22] It found that the Synod of South Carolina had taken no notice of it, and that the Allegheny Synod was also silent and expressed its regret that such was the attitude "of this active and zealous body of ministers and people." The next year, however, this synod took the following action, which doubtless warmed the hearts of the Franckean Synod men, viz.:[23]

> Resolved, That the time has in our opinion arrived, when ecclesiastical associations are in duty bound to express their views on the system of American Slavery.

[19] *Journal*, 1841, p. 24.

[20] *Ibid.*, 1842, p. 12. This *Appeal* was printed only in the *Lutheran Herald* (Vol. IV, No. 13). A copy of this has not been found.

[21] *Ibid.*, 1843, p. 6.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 21.

[23] *Proceedings* (Allegheny Synod, organized 1842), 1844, p. 13.

Therefore, *Resolved*, That we believe this system to be a moral, civil, and religious evil, in conflict with the best interests of society, oppressive in its character and dishonorable to God and man.

In view of this extreme expression it is indeed strange that this action was the only recorded action on the subject by this synod before the war.

The Committee further found that the minutes of the Maryland Synod yielded this report:[24]

Your committe reports that the second document handed to them is a memorial on the subject of slavery from the Evangelical Lutheran Franckean Synod. Your committee would recommend that as this Synod cannot entertain any subject not immediately connected with our Synodical business, the memorial be laid on the table.

This report had been accepted, and so the Franckean Synod's Committee very properly commented: "We must therefore regard this Synod as pro-slavery."

The Committee also reported that the Hartwick Synod had hitherto refused to express disapprobation of the sin of slavery and now had refused to consider the *Appeal* or to respond to it. It further expressed surprise at the silence of the Ohio Synod, and asked if it should be considered pro-slavery. Such an assumption was unfair in view of the following action taken by the latter in August, 1844:[25]

In regard to a petition for an expression of sentiment on Slavery by the Synod, it was

Resolved, That this Synod regards slavery as an evil, which all Christians should deplore.

This position was maintained, as later references on the same subject show.

The Franckean Synod's Committee further stated that the Virginia Synod had not noticed the *Appeal* or expressed an opinion on the sin of slavery. This could have been foretold by

[24] *Minutes*, 1842, p. 23.

[25] As reported in the *Lutheran Observer* for October 25, 1844. This synod was really the East Ohio Synod (1836) and is not to be confused with the Ohio Synod (1818), referred to above.

its action of 1839, referred to above. The Committee also reported that the reaction of the Synod of the West was to be seen in the minutes of that body, in which the following action of October, 1842, was reported, viz.:[26]

> Resolved, That we feel grateful to the Franckean Synod for their well meant attempt to enlighten us on the subject of American Slavery, and that our minds being always open to conviction on any subject, so soon as conviction has done its work, we will act; at the same time recommend to them the propriety of considering well the measures of abolitionists in the present day before they act.

The Franckean Synod continued its active agitation of the cause of anti-slavery at its conventions, 1844–47. In 1844 it expressed its deep regret that slavery prevailed to such an alarming extent throughout the churches of the land and was also "countenanced by the greater portion of the Lutheran Churches and Synods in the United States."[27] Wherefore it was resolved that "our duty demands that we dissolve all Christian connection with slave trafficers [sic] and slaveholders on the same ground and for the same reasons that we do persons of other sins and immoralities." In 1845 it resolved that the synod could not hold fellowship with any ecclesiastical body which tolerated, apologized for, or was silent on the sin of American slavery, especially if such bodies defended the sin by an appeal to the Bible, "which to us is blasphemy."[28] It further resolved that the time had come when pious and honest slaveholding was as manifest an absurdity as *pious polygamy* or *honest robbery*. It is of interest to note, as throwing light on the spirit and genius of this synod, that at this convention it "resolved" on many subjects of moral or humanitarian interest—slavery, hanging, war, "popery," etc. Its activity represents a fine example of "humanitarian crusading," so popular among church bodies of the time, but most unusual for a Lutheran synod.

[26] *Journal*, 1842, p. 15. This Synod (1835) had churches in Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois, and Iowa.

[27] *Ibid.*, 1844, pp. 15, 17, 18.

[28] *Ibid.*, 1845, pp. 18–21.

At the convention of 1846 a special committee was appointed to correspond with other synodical bodies which had taken action on the subject of American slavery, in order to induce them to appoint a committee to draft a joint protest and to secure the signatures of as many as possible of the Lutheran clergy.[29] The War with Mexico was condemned as commenced and carried out for the sole protection, perpetuation, and enlargement of the system of American slavery; and it was resolved that it was in the province of the pulpit to speak out and bring light and truth before the people on this subject.[30]

In 1847 the committee appointed at the last session to correspond with other bodies relative to getting up a *Protest* against American slavery made some statements concerning difficulties which they found in their way, inasmuch as they did not have a printed form to present to their correspondents. Upon motion it was therefore decided to appoint a committee of three to draft a clerical *Protest*. This was to be presented to the Lutheran clergymen in the United States for their signatures and was to be printed at the expense of synod.[31] Reaction to this will be noted later.

At this same convention the constitution of the body was revised, and further evidence of its extreme position is found in the revision.[32] Article VII, section 7, forbids synodical membership to any minister who has any connection with the business of intoxicating liquor as a beverage, or who is a slaveholder, or traffics in human beings, or who *shall not oppose the system of American slavery*. Article VIII, section 2, forbids seats to lay delegates who have any connection with the business of intoxicating liquor as a beverage, or are slaveholders, or *justify the sin of American slavery*.

The reaction of the Maryland Synod to the *Protest* is de-

[29] *Ibid.*, 1846, pp. 16, 17.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

[31] *Ibid.*, 1847, pp. 15–18.

[32] *Constitution of the Synod*, revised and adopted June 7, 1847, attached to the *Journal*, 1847, p. 31.

scribed in the *Proceedings* of that body for 1848,[33] when a committee reported that it had at hand a printed remonstrance against American slavery, "purporting to be from ministers of the Lutheran denomination, not mentioning who they are." It notes that there is appended a note by the Rev. Van Alstine, of Minden, New York, requesting the secretary to procure signatures of the clergy and return the document to him. The committee reported: "Inasmuch as there is no restriction of the individual opinion of ministers of our church, your committee recommends that the document be handed to the Secretary, and returned to the Rev. Van Alstine, with the names of any who may see proper to sign it." This was typical of the attitude of the Maryland Synod—it would not take official action on the slavery question. Being a strong and vigorous body, it contained elements of different opinions, just as did the state of Maryland. It would not allow the question to disrupt an otherwise peaceful status.

The Synod of North Carolina appears to have been the only one in which slavery was defended to take official notice of the action of the Franckean Synod. In 1847 the Corresponding Secretary reported his examination of the proceedings of the latter body and noted that it had "utterly disfellowshipped us." The synod, after discussion of this report, resolved to instruct the secretary to return the *incendiary document*, in the form of a Minute, "to the source from whence it came."[34]

Without any apparent special pressure from the Franckean Synod, the Pittsburgh Synod[35] in May, 1846, took the following action, which must have delighted the hearts of the men of the radical group: "Resolved, That the practice of buying and selling men, women, and children, ... , is, in the opinion of this Synod, a moral and national evil, and an offence condemned by the principles of humanity and the word of God."

[33] P. 12.

[34] *Minutes*, 1847, pp. 16, 20.

[35] Organized 1845. Action recorded in *Minutes*, 1846, p. 36. At that time the body contained 64 congregations and 4,162 communicants.

The Franckean Synod continued its agitation unabated and took every opportunity to give further expression to its oft-expressed convictions. In 1850 it numbered 50 churches and 3,213 communicants, a notable growth considering its situation. At its convention in 1851 it adopted strong resolutions on civil government and the Fugitive Slave Law.[36]

In the meantime the General Synod continued to avoid a stand on slavery, confining its attention to purely ecclesiastical interests. In this way it kept its ranks unbroken and held in membership synods from all parts of the country. Displeasure at its stand was, however, expressed by one synod which should, by its otherwise agreeable attitudes, have been a member of this general body. This was the Pittsburgh Synod, which gave among the reasons for its refusal to join the General Synod that it was identified with slavery; that delegates who were slaveholders were admitted; and that "we by uniting become implicated in the sin of slavery." This position, though strenuously opposed by some, finally excited the minds of enough members to cause the pending vote for union to be lost.[37] The next year arrangements were made to join the General Synod, but the following resolution was passed to safeguard the synod's position on slavery:[38] "Resolved, That by uniting with the General Synod, we do not change our relations or position in regard to slavery, as defined in our printed minutes."

Lutheranism in Ohio had a number of divisions, most of which were of a geographical nature, but some the result of hostility to the strict confessional position of the original synod. The Wittenberg Synod (1847) gave expression of the latter spirit. Throughout its history it was interested in moral reform. In 1852 the following action was taken:[39]

[36] *Journal*, 1851, pp. 15, 16.

[37] *Minutes* (Pittsburgh Synod), 1851, p. 18. See also E. B. Burgess, *Memorial History of the Pittsburgh Synod* (Greenville, 1925), pp. 104, 105.

[38] *Minutes*, 1852, pp. 20, 21.

[39] *Proceedings*, 1852, p. 19.

Resolved, That we as a Synod regard the system of American Slavery as a great national evil, and an abomination in the sight of God, and that we deem it proper to urge our members to make it a subject of special prayer, imploring Almighty God to grant wisdom unto those who legislate, so that some plan may be devised for its speedy extinction, and also that we use our influence for its removal from our nation.

The next year this cautious action was taken,[40] namely, that every Christian and Christian minister was bound to promote in every judicious way the cause of temperance and the abolition of American slavery; but as some advocates of these are enemies of the Christian religion, they should be careful lest the cause of truth be compromised.

In the later decades before the war, other synods, recently organized in the Middle West, were generally silent on the subject of slavery. Of these, the Olive Branch Synod (1848), made up largely of congregations in Indiana, and the Miami Synod (1844), made up largely of congregations in Ohio, made no mention of slavery officially. This is noteworthy, since both were interested in moral reform and so expressed themselves. On the other hand, the Synod of Illinois (1846) was not only silent on slavery but had little to say on any moral issue, while the Synod of Northern Illinois (1851) legislated only on temperance. Both of these were pioneer synods and probably felt that their primary work was in establishing the church before giving their interest and energy to outside causes. Of course, the determining factor might have been the nature of local sentiment toward slavery. The Synod of Kentucky (1854), with a minority of churches in Kentucky, the others mainly in Indiana, and a few in Iowa, took no action on slavery. The Synod of Northern Indiana (1855) on several occasions passed resolutions on temperance, but only once mentioned slavery. The report of the Committee on the *Journal of the Franckean Synod* stated:[41]

Your committee finds only 2 items in this Journal that shall claim the attention of this Synod, viz.: An abhorrence of the evils of American

[40] *Minutes*, 1853, p. 26.

[41] *Minutes* (Synod of Northern Indiana), September, 1859, p. 19.

Slavery and the use of ardent spirits as a beverage. As your committee believes them to be crying sins and destructive to the advancement of the Redeemer's Kingdom, would recommend that we labor and pray for the abolition and destruction of those great evils.

As a last synod of the Middle West, the Synod of Southern Illinois is mentioned, which was organized in 1857 when the Synod of the West disbanded. It consisted of congregations in Illinois, Missouri, and Tennessee. Its minutes make no mention of slavery.

In the East, the Synod of West Pennsylvania (1825), while showing interest in reform, took no action on slavery; and the Synod of East Pennsylvania (1842), which kept close to church and religious interests, ignored the slavery question. The Synod of Central Pennsylvania (1855) was also silent on the subject.

The Synod of Western Virginia (1842) did not mention slavery until in 1859 its delegate to the General Synod reported that[42] the questions of slavery and symbolism were both extensively debated at the late meeting of the General Synod, without that asperity and acrimony which generally attend the discussions of these questions.[43] The little Mississippi Synod (1855), which reported 289 white and 53 colored communicants in 1858, as might be expected, made no mention of slavery.

To this point attention has been given almost entirely to a study of Lutheran church bodies which were generally English-speaking or the descendants of the old eastern synods. In these the process of Americanization had virtually been completed, although most of the bodies were receiving members from the later immigration. At the same time that the Anti-Slavery Crusade was beginning, large numbers of German Lutherans, and a little later large numbers of Scandinavians, were coming to swell the tide of Lutheran growth and forming their own church or-

[42] *Minutes*, 1859, p. 7.

[43] The *Minutes* of the General Synod for 1859 do not reveal such discussion. But they never record debates. Leaders of the General Synod, from sections, were trying hard to keep the question from the floor but each biennium found greater pressure being exerted to force an expression of opinion. See Heathcote, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

ganizations. It is important to learn what attitudes, if any, these organizations took toward slavery.

Notice has already been taken of position of the Synod of Ohio, which after 1835 came to be known as the Joint Synod of Ohio. Its strict confessional attitude was further strengthened by the fact that after 1830 its growth was mainly due to contemporary immigration. As the strictest example of confessionalism and all that that implied, attention must now be given to the synodical organization known as the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. This body had its origin in the arrival in Missouri in 1839 of a group of Saxon Lutherans, "imbued with a double portion of the spirit of confessionalism."[44] The numbers increased, and the leadership was assumed by the Rev. C. F. W. Walther, who ranks as one of the three or four outstanding personalities in the Lutheran church in America. He and his followers were distinguished not only for the ardor of their confessionalism but also for the depth of their piety. In 1845 steps were taken to form a synodical organization, which was formally completed in 1847.

In the whole period before the war this body was officially silent on the subject of slavery, as it was on all questions not of clear and immediate ecclesiastical interest. This does not necessarily mean that, as individuals, the members were not ardently interested in these matters. But, so far as the synod itself was concerned, it was silent. This was not only because of its position on theoretical grounds but also because it was actively engaged in establishing and extending itself for which it conserved its energy.

The Swedes had been coming in considerable numbers since the forties but for a time were content to join existing Lutheran bodies. Finally, in 1860 they organized, with certain Norwegians, the Scandinavian Augustana Synod.[45] A study of the min-

[44] A. R. Wentz, *The Lutheran Church in American History* (Philadelphia, 1923), p. 134.

[45] The *Lutheran Almanac* for 1861 gives the strength of this body as 27 ministers 25 churches, and 5,000 communicants.

utes of this synod reveals no official action by this body on slavery before the war, but it is well understood that the Swedes, as individuals, were opposed to the institution.

To complete a study of the various national groups of Lutherans and their attitudes toward slavery, attention must be given to the Norwegians, whose immigration began in 1825. They came with an aversion to the system; and it is not unexpected that their church bodies expressed themselves on the subject, even though there were influential leaders among them who took the strict Lutheran position of the impropriety of the consideration of such matters by ecclesiastical bodies, regardless of the views of individual members and the acknowledged justification of these views.

The earliest official pronouncement seems to have been Article 14 of the "Old Constitution." This was agreed to in 1850 and was the "Church-Constitution for the Evangelical Lutheran Church at Jefferson Prairie, etc., in North America," or "Eielsen's Synod," which was one of three bodies to which Norwegian Lutherans adhered, the others being the Augustana and the Norwegian Synod.[46] Article 14 sets forth that "we united ones" repudiate the "fearful sin of giving our consent to the slave traffic" but rather will use "all possible diligence in bringing about, and supporting opposition to it, to the freeing of the negroes." This has scriptural appeal in Matthew 7:12. Negroes have the same spiritual heritage as other races. The other two bodies were more confessional in their views and took no official action on the question before the war.

In the six or seven years before the war, which came partly at least as the result of anti-slavery agitation which it had helped to advance, the Franckean Synod continued its crusade with even greater energy. Space permits only a few representative details by way of showing why this small body, by its vigorous agitation, received notice and exerted an influence far

[46] For this treatment I am solely indebted to J. M. Rohne, *Norwegian American Lutheranism up to 1872* (New York, 1926), chaps. v and vi and pp. 101 ff., 109, 134, 207.

out of proportion to its size. In 1854 the Committee on Slavery declared, in part:[47]

> From whatever standpoint we may view the system of American Slavery, and take into account the increasing, unscrupulous, and strenuous efforts put forth to establish it universally and permanently, to fortify and defend it, we should feel every passion and power aroused, with all our influence and bring them to bear, in all proper channels, to oppose, arrest, and over-throw this system of despotism, with all its grinding and double-distilled horrors.

In 1856 the "Report on Slavery" contained threatening statements.[48] The "Slave Power" was condemned in relation to Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Isthmus of Darien. But, "the time for *action*, decisive *action*, has come. And the word *action* at this conjuncture has an awful significance." A great political contest was noted as before the country; no one should shrink from duty. In 1859 the "Report on Slavery" was adopted without discussion.[49] In it the oft-repeated attitude of the synod on the subject was affirmed.

A conclusion from the foregoing presentation of the official attitudes of the several Lutheran synods and the General Synod concerning slavery is that the church as a whole did not formally and authoritatively deliver itself on the subject nor did it seek to force a consensus of opinion. The very nature of the church in America made this impossible. It was not a united organization. In the second place, it had no desire so to do, since it was always questionable, among Lutherans, whether such a subject as slavery had a proper right to the attention of the church, as an ecclesiastical body.

While not so numerous as the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches, the Lutheran church in 1860 was of sufficient numerical strength to be reckoned as a real force in both the religious and civil life of the day.[50] What is more important, it

[47] *Journal*, 1854, p. 13.

[48] *Ibid.*, 1856, pp. 13, 14.

[49] *Ibid.*, 1859, pp. 11, 12.

[50] It numbered, in 1860, 2,219 congregations and 245,726 communicants, thus something over a million of constituency. Its rapid growth was due mainly to immigration.

was nearly as widely distributed as any denomination, and far more so than some; and it clearly represented more diverse racial elements than any, while it showed about the same cross-section of social classes as the more numerous bodies.

The official position of the Lutheran church is of importance as helping to demonstrate the general status of public opinion on the slavery question before the Civil War. However, when the war came, it, as were all churches which had representation in all sections of the country, was to be affected profoundly. Then its district and general synodical bodies in general were to take very definite official stands, always according to the prejudices of the several sections, and the confessional attitudes professed.

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Date Due

NOV 16 '51			
NOV 20 '52			
FEB 15 '58			
MAR 6 '59			
AUG 22 '59			
OCT 28 '59			
FEB 16 '60			
DEC 5 '69			
FEB 13 '87			
MAY 14 '93			
DEC 16 '05			
Cluster 8			
Cluster 10			
Demco 293-5			